

Soviet Legislature Rejects Lithuanian Independence

By Michael Dobbs
Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, March 15—The Soviet Union's highest legislative body today pronounced Lithuania's declaration of independence invalid and instructed President Mikhail Gorbachev to ensure that Soviet laws are respected on Lithuanian territory.

A resolution adopted by the Congress of People's Deputies following an emotional debate acknowledged the theoretical right of Lithuania, as one of the Soviet Union's 15 constituent republics, to secede. But it insisted that Lithuanians should not be allowed to exercise this right without taking into account the political, economic and territorial interests of the rest of the country.

The heated tone of today's debate suggested that Lithuania's efforts to gain full legal independence are likely to be long and complicated, with the Kremlin doing all it can—short of using military force—to prevent a breakup of the Soviet Union.

Some Slavic deputies demanded that Lithuania be required to give up some of its territory and pay huge sums in compensation if it goes ahead with its plans for independence.

"Let's not feel sorry for people who do not feel sorry for us," declared the commander of the Soviet Union's Baltic fleet, Adm. Vitali Ivanov. "Lithuania's declaration of

independence is a blow in the back of our political reforms, the security of our country, and the fate and destiny of millions of our people."

Several speakers insisted that last Sunday's declaration of independence by the Lithuanian legislature did not reflect the will of the Lithuanian people because of a low turnout in the republic's elections last month. They accused the leaders of the pro-independence movement Sajudis of pushing for secession to advance their political careers.

Most Lithuanian deputies stayed away from the debate, saying they no longer wish to take part in the proceedings of a foreign legislature. The chair on the presidium reserved for Lithuania was empty, as it has been throughout the three-day congress.

The republic's deputy prime minister, Kazimiera Prunskiene, described the congress's resolution as "primitive" and said it would not deter Lithuania from pressing ahead with independence. She said that the Lithuanian government was gradually establishing control over its territory by asserting its authority over the police force and stopping the draft of Lithuanian men.

"What matters is not these declarations by the congress, but negotiations between us and Moscow," Prunskiene said in a telephone interview from Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital.

At his first presidential press

conference this evening, Gorbachev appeared to soften his earlier opposition to negotiations with Lithuania, saying he was in favor of "a mutually respectful dialogue." Both Lithuania and Estonia, where an independence campaign also is underway, have been invited to send a delegation for talks in Moscow this month with senior officials of the Supreme Soviet, the country's standing legislature.

"My idea is to preserve the union on the basis of a different approach to each republic, on the basis of a new union treaty," Gorbachev told the press conference, adding that secession could only come at the end of a lengthy bargaining process.

The Kremlin has already suggested Lithuania may have to pay \$34 billion in hard currency for federal investments in the republic in the past. Planning chief Yuri Maslyukov today told the congress that the Lithuanian government would also be required to pay for costs of resettling its minority Slav population in Russia and dismantling defense factories.

An ethnic Russian from Lithuania, Nikolai Medvedev, was interrupted by shouts of "shame" when he told the congress that the Bolsheviks had killed some 400,000 Lithuanians after annexing the republic in 1940—twice as many as had died under the Nazis. He said he feared that the resolution would only exacerbate tensions between the Lithuanian majority and the Slav minority.

A senior Gorbachev aide, Valentin Falin, rebutted Medvedev's claims, asserting that Lithuanians themselves were guilty of war crimes against Russians. He also quoted a retired American diplomat as describing the Baltic republic as the "best launching pad for the military penetration of Russia."

Once a considerable European power, Lithuania was incorporated into czarist Russia in 1795, but regained its independence in 1920. Together with the neighboring Baltic states of Latvia and Estonia, it was annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940 under a secret wartime pact between Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler.

The congress adopted the resolution on Lithuania by 1,463 votes to 94 after amending the draft to tone down language originally proposed by the presidium. The resolution said that Lithuanian independence measures were invalid pending adoption by the Supreme Soviet of a law on mechanics of secession, now under consideration.

The resolution instructed Gorbachev and the government to "guarantee the protection of the legal rights of every person living on Lithuanian territory as well as the rights of the union and other republics." It invoked articles 74 and 75 of the Soviet constitution, which declare that Soviet law has precedence over laws of individual Soviet republics.

Several deputies called for tougher action against Lithuania, including immediate imposition of Soviet presidential rule, as provided for under constitutional amendments this week.

A Ukrainian army officer, Nikolai Petrusenko, said the military should search for Lithuanian deserters and draft evaders. "If necessary, paratroopers are prepared to go and find deserters in the villages and in the very streets and squares of Vilnius," Petrusenko told the congress.

Some liberal deputies, however, expressed support for the Lithuanians. A constitutional lawyer from Leningrad, Yuri Boldirev, demanded to know what right the congress had to ignore the "will of the people of Lithuania expressed through the highest body in the republic."

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